

# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

## SUMMARY OF ETHICS RULES FOR PERSONS WHO WORK WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



**2017**

ETHICS LAW AND PROGRAMS DIVISION  
OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
202-482-5384 – [ethicsdivision@doc.gov](mailto:ethicsdivision@doc.gov) – [www.commerce.gov/ethics](http://www.commerce.gov/ethics)

# STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

Persons who work with the United States Government are held to a high standard of conduct to ensure public confidence in the integrity of Government actions. Just as Federal employees are subject to certain ethics regulations, persons who work with the Government are also subject to certain ethical standards, whether you serve as a contractor, an industry representative on a Federal advisory committee, an advisor or consultant to a Federal source evaluation panel, a volunteer student intern, or otherwise. Listed below are some of the rules that you must follow. Violations of some of these rules may subject you to criminal or civil penalties.

If you have a question about these rules or other ethics issue, please contact  
the Ethics Law and Programs Division,  
Office of the General Counsel,  
U.S. Department of Commerce,  
at 202-482-5384  
or [ethicsdivision@doc.gov](mailto:ethicsdivision@doc.gov).

## MISUSE OF GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

**USE OF EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, AND SERVICES** – Government resources may only be used for official authorized Government activities. This includes use of:

- Government equipment (including cell phones and other mobile devices, computers, and photocopying machines);
- Government supplies (including agency letterhead and Government envelopes);
- Government services (including telephone and fax services); and
- the time of Government personnel.

If you are working in a Government office, you should be careful to preserve Government property. If you are entitled to reimbursement from the Government for certain expenditures, such as travel costs, you must ensure that all charges you claim are legally authorized.

## MISUSE OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

**USE OF NON-PUBLIC INFORMATION** – Information you obtain through of your work with the Federal Government may not be used for your private activities or disseminated to anyone outside the Government unless the person is specifically authorized to receive the information. Information that is protected from improper use or dissemination includes:

- nonpublic trade data;
- nonpublic economic analyses;
- private personnel information;
- source selection and other nonpublic procurement information;
- classified national security information;
- protected census data;
- patent information;
- proprietary business data and trade secrets; and
- other nonpublic information.

Government information is another form of Government property. Just as Government supplies and equipment may not be used for personal activities, information obtained by the Government may only be used for Government programs. Release or dissemination of such information must be authorized by a Federal official.

**PENALTIES** – Depending on the nature of the information, improper use or release may result in criminal charges (such as for misuse of national security information) or civil liability (such as for misuse of business proprietary information or information covered by the Privacy Act).

## MISUSE OF GOVERNMENT AFFILIATION

**REFERENCES TO ASSOCIATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT** – You may not use your association with the Government, including business contacts obtained through your work with the Government, to try to obtain personal benefits or favors for yourself, friends, relatives, or business associates.

Because you are not a Federal employee, you may not represent that you serve or act on behalf of the Federal Government unless you are specifically authorized to do so with regard to the specific matter. You may not use your association with the Government to imply that the Government endorses your personal activities. Therefore, you may not use a Government logo or seal on your personal business card or stationery or refer to a Government office on your business card unless your relationship with the Government is made clear (for example, “contractor for the International Trade Administration” or “member of the Industry Trade Advisory Committee on Consumer Goods”).

## ADDITIONAL RULES

**RESTRICTIONS IN AGREEMENTS AND CONTRACTS** – Additional rules may apply depending on the specific arrangement or agreement between you or your employer and the Federal Government. For example, a clause in a contract under which you provide services to the Government may subject you to the same standards of ethical conduct applicable to Federal employees or may restrict you from engaging in certain activities. Similarly, if working under a student volunteer agreement or a memorandum of understanding, the terms of the agreement may impose limitations on your activities. These special provisions may require you to disclose information regarding your financial interests or employment, bar you from accepting certain gifts or payments, or otherwise regulate your conduct.

**GIFTS TO FEDERAL EMPLOYEES** – Federal employees are subject to ethics rules barring them from asking for a gift or from accepting gifts greater than \$20 from someone with business with their agency (unless based on a personal relationship). Because of these rules, even if you work in an office with Federal employees, you may need to be treated differently than agency staff with regard to office parties and gift exchanges.

*PREPARED BY THE ETHICS LAW AND PROGRAMS DIVISION, OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL,  
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JULY 29, 2016*